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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [ENRG](#) [KU](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: REGIONAL MARINE ENVIRONMENT HEAD TALKS WATER  
POLLUTION, CONCERNS OVER IRAN

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 30, Ambassador met with the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) Executive Secretary Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Awadhi to discuss his organization's work. ROPME is funded by the six GCC countries plus Iraq and Iran, and is responsible for monitoring pollution and environmental degradation in the Persian Gulf, which it carries out by monitoring satellite imagery and collecting water and soil samples. Al-Awadhi identified pollution from ships as the primary concern, noting that 70,000 ships pass through Gulf waters each year. He also expressed concern about Iran's Bushehr nuclear facility, noting that its location on the water could cause serious environmental damage should there be radiation leakage. Al-Awadhi said the Iranians had been unresponsive to requests for information on the environmental impact of Bushehr. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On January 30, Ambassador, accompanied by Econoff, met with the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) Acting Coordinator Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Awadhi. ROPME was founded in 1978 on the heels of the Regional Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Areas of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Since that time, ROPME has monitored water quality and pollution levels in the Persian Gulf, and provided training to member states' environmental authorities.

¶3. (U) Every three years ROPME sends a survey ship to take water and soil samples from 300 different locations in the Gulf. The first of these surveys, in the early 1990s, was conducted in conjunction with the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and provided what Al-Awadhi described as "a baseline" of data, which was, he said, "not as bad as we had thought." Al-Awadhi said these surveys cost approximately \$750,000 each to conduct, but that they will soon be replaced by a system of sensor-equipped buoys.

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Environmental Challenges in the Gulf  
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¶4. (U) Al-Awadhi highlighted the challenges to the Gulf's marine environment, noting that ship pollution was his primary concern. He said that around 70,000 ships per year transit the Gulf, and that ship-borne sewage, oil waste, and contaminated ballast water are all serious environmental hazards. At present, most of these pollutants are dumped in the Gulf of Oman before ships enter the Straits of Hormuz and into the Gulf proper. Al-Awadhi said that ROPME uses satellite imagery to detect pollution in this area. The volume of shipping raises the risk of incidents such as oil spills, he said, noting that roughly 25,000 oil tankers enter

the Gulf each year. Al-Awadhi said GCC countries have discussed constructing a North-South pipeline to an offshore berth on the Omani coast (outside the Gulf itself) to reduce the risk, but he did not indicate that these talks had made much progress.

15. (U) The Gulf is a shallow, and therefore fragile body of water, Al-Awadhi said. Upstream dams have reduced the volume of water entering it, and reliance on desalination has lowered the water level and led to increased salinity. He said lower water levels mean more tidal incursion from the Gulf of Oman, bringing foreign marine species which threaten indigenous marine life. Al-Awadhi said that the Gulf "could be a dead sea within 15 years if we do nothing."

16. (U) Al-Awadhi listed other environmental challenges in the region such as reviving the Iraqi marshes, completion of a certification program to ensure that ships dispose of waste properly, and an agreement with GCC nations that no "substandard" ships be allowed into Gulf ports. He gave the example of requiring that all oil tankers be double-hulled. Al-Awadhi asserted that ROPME has the authority to seize ships that do not comply with environmental regulations in international waters, although he was equivocal when asked exactly how that works.

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Worries About Bushehr  
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17. (SBU) Al-Awadhi expressed concern about the Iranian nuclear facility at Bushehr, noting that its location on the water could have disastrous consequences in the event of radiation leakage. Radiation leakage in water, he explained, is difficult to detect, and could easily seep into the human

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food chain through fish and other marine animals. He said he has been unsuccessful in getting information from the Iranian government about the Bushehr project, and said that he didn't think Iran had taken the environmental impact into serious account. Al-Awadhi suggested that the USG voice its concerns over Iran's nuclear activity in terms of its environmental impact, which he said was "just as serious as making a bomb."  
LeBaron